

# PUBLIC HEALTH REPORT

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## The Challenge Ahead

WITH THE PASSING OF THE 1960s, it is appropriate to review public health accomplishments in California during the last decade and to look ahead at problems requiring solution in the next.

Prevention and control efforts have brought considerable progress in communicable disease. For these advances the medical profession and state and local health agencies are responsible.

Constant surveillance has kept up defenses against smallpox, malaria and encephalitis, among other diseases. Poliomyelitis has been virtually wiped out. Measles has declined dramatically. As a result of the priority given to syphilis control and the mobilization of personnel and resources in federally-funded projects in 53 counties, syphilis tapered off steadily beginning about 1964.

In other areas of disease, too, the partnership of medicine and public health has brought gratifying results. Physicians have been responsible for a continuing decline in deaths from cancer of the cervix through widespread application of the "Pap" smear and early detection.

The State Health Department's California Tumor Registry, oldest and largest in the nation, continues to provide essential data for evaluation of various cancer treatment programs, with its record of 300,000 cancer cases dating back to 1942.

The State Health Department, often at the behest of the Legislature, has begun to provide new services and programs based on medical advances and techniques developed during the decade. State funds established two renal dialysis centers, with the Department receiving legislative responsibility for implementing the program. Children with phenylketonuria receive treatment under the Crippled Children Services. The recent development of an

immune globulin to prevent sensitization of newborns in erythroblastosis fetalis resulted in a legislative requirement for Rh-typing of mothers and reporting of sensitized infants to the Department for follow-up.

During the decade the Department has been able to provide new services to California communities:

- In 1964 the Legislature passed a resolution that family planning counseling be made available in public health programs to those who seek it voluntarily.

- In the last half of the decade the Department has offered community-wide services for the mentally retarded through regional centers. Four of the nine authorized centers are already in operation and five more are tooling up.

- A major advance during the last decade is the isolation of the rubella virus. Much of the developmental work in diagnostic tests was done in the Department's Virus Laboratory. With vaccine available, rubella diagnostic tests assume added importance.

- The Virus Laboratory is taking advantage of new developments to meet the challenge of hepatitis, mobilizing personnel to do clinical and field studies and instituting tests to learn the cause, dissemination and pathologic features of hepatitis.

- A major effort of the Virus Laboratory in the next decade will go into determining the possible role of viruses in human cancer. For 7 or 8 years work has been done on animals, but this investigation must be carried over to man.

- A step forward during the decade is the advent of comprehensive health planning. California's medical and public health professionals, together with community representatives, are engaged in statewide planning in many areas of health facilities, services and resources.

On the other side of the ledger, there are many areas which require strenuous efforts in the years to come:

- Efforts to control chronic disease have been less successful than in the case of communicable disease. Little control has been achieved over degenerative diseases, including heart disease and

stroke, and hypertension associated with those causes of death which kill people at a later age.

- Nationwide, the average length of life has increased only a little from 1960 to 1966 — from 69.7 to 70.1 years. We do not know how much life expectancy could be increased if certain factors of disease could be controlled.

- California's infant mortality rate should be lowered. Although it declined from 23.3 per 1,000 live births in 1960 to 19.0 in 1968 and is lower than that of the nation, other states have a better record. Major factors are the existence of high risk populations and the unevenness in availability and quality of medical care services for these groups.

- In 1968 gonorrhea increased for the ninth consecutive year, with 29,000 more cases reported than in 1966. This is partly because of diversion of forces against syphilis at the expense of gonorrhea, but also because of lack of follow-up on gonorrhea contacts.

- There is an urgent need for preventive programs against drug abuse by young people.

- Dental disease, two-thirds of which is preventable, has received little attention.

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Substantial progress has taken place in many areas of environmental health in the last decade. Public concern over air and water pollution has stimulated political interest and brought considerable money for control. But the problems are far from solved.

Although environmental factors are acknowledged as important determinants of health, we must also recognize that the human environment includes not only land, air and water but our home, work and recreational surroundings, transportation systems, food, drugs and all products we consume or use.

More knowledge is needed about the effects of additives and preservatives in our food. We must develop a greater concern over long-term effects of pesticides, as well as over methods of handling and processing foods. When California completes its Nutrition Survey early next year we will know

more about the nutritional status of Californians, including the problem of protein calorie deficiency which causes anemia and lowered resistance to infection.

In the next decade much more attention must be devoted to the factors in residential environment which are deterrents to good health, to community noise now recognized as an important environmental health problem, and to the prevention of accidents and injuries which take a large social and economic toll. Radical changes must be made in solid waste management, both to control land pollution and to conserve resources. We must guarantee healthful water and food supplies, the safety and efficacy of medicinal drugs, protection from radiation, occupational health and safety and vector control.

Public health, in short, must assume a leadership role in efforts to preserve and enhance overall environmental quality, no facet of which can be considered unrelated to health.

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A most pressing need in the decade to come is to establish a more effective system for the delivery of comprehensive, high quality health care services to all Californians. Medicine and technology have far outstripped our ability to provide their benefits impartially to all people, rich or poor, black or white. This inadequacy is caused in part by a critical health manpower shortage. The State Health Department has taken a leading role in promoting training of health manpower, but ingenious and creative solutions to the shortage must be sought by health agencies throughout the state. The inequitable distribution of available manpower and the fragmentation in the total health care system also contribute to uneven application of health resources throughout the population.

Finally, we must take cognizance of the human and social aspects of medicine and public health. Instead of doing things for or to people, we must increasingly do things with them. We must seek the active and informed participation of the consumer in the distribution of health care services.

### ***Attention, Pathologists***

***Jon V. Straumfjord, Jr., M.D., Ph.D., Professor and Chairman of the Department of Clinical Pathology and Clinical Pathologist in Chief, University Hospital, University of Alabama, will speak at the Pathology Section Meeting of the Annual Scientific Assembly, March 7th. Mark your calendar!***